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Intelligence Note - 82

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To: The Secretary Through: S/S  
Through: S/S  
From: INR - Thomas L. Hughes

Subject: Ayub Seeks Talks with the Opposition on the Political Crisis

After three months of anti-government rioting, the regime of President Ayub Khan, bowing to the inevitable, has moved to open a dialogue with the political opposition in an effort to restore civil calm. Following up the promise in his First-of-the-Month speech, Ayub has invited "responsible" opposition leaders to meet him on February 17 to discuss the political crisis and possible constitutional reforms. The opposition has not replied directly to Ayub's invitation. Individual opposition leaders, however, have publicly stated their conditions for such a meeting, and Ayub has been receptive to these conditions. The question now seems to be whether or not internal disunity will prevent the opposition from presenting a united front in the talks with Ayub. In any event, rivalries within the opposition are likely to prolong the political crisis, as various factions maneuver for partisan advantage and Ayub seeks to exploit the opposition's disunity. The opening of the dialogue has had a calming effect on street violence, but the opposition, by scheduling a nation-wide general strike for February 14, has served notice that it has by no means discarded civil disorder as a device to maintain pressure on Ayub.

Ayub's Concessions. Responding to the first indications that Ayub would seek a meeting with the opposition, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, spokesman for the Democratic Action Committee (DAC) the opposition's overall organization, announced five preconditions for such a meeting: (1) withdrawal of the Army from the cities, (2) lifting of curfews, (3) repeal of the state of emergency and the government's extraordinary powers, (4) release of political prisoners and students arrested during the riots, (5) restoration of civil rights.

Ayub's actions in the light of the DAC's conditions clearly indicate that he is determined to do his utmost to bring about the meeting. The invitation to the February 17 meeting was routed through Nasrullah Khan. Army units have been relieved of most police duties and the curfew has been lifted. Schools have been reopened, except in Karachi, and a policy of permissiveness has replaced that of strong police repression. Ayub has promised early repeal of the state of emergency and has implied that persons in custody under the Defense of Pakistan Rules would be released in the near future. Several politicians and over a hundred students were released on February 10. In a surprise move the same day, the West Pakistan High Court stopped proceedings against Ayub's arch-political foe, former Foreign Minister Z. A. Bhutto, and ordered him transferred from jail to house arrest at his Larkana farm. In support of its action the Court referred to the Government's intention to repeal the emergency laws, which would vacate the case against Bhutto.

Opposition's Reply Awaited. A public dialogue between the regime and the opposition is continuing, with Ayub thus far making all of the concessions. The DAC Central Committee, which met in Dacca on February 9, adjourned, however, without formulating an answer to Ayub's invitation. Nasrullah Khan called on Ayub on February 10 to discuss opposition representation at the meeting and to negotiate the release of leaders of two of the DAC coalition parties--Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the Awami League, under trial in the so-called Agartala Conspiracy Case, and Khan Abdul Wali Khan of the National Awami Party, who was arrested during the rioting last November.

The DAC cannot, of course, speak for the two parties outside of the coalition--Bhutto's Peoples Party (PPP) and Maulana Bhashani's pro-Peking faction of the NAP. As much as Ayub and the DAC might prefer to exclude the PPP and Bhashani's NAP, the supporters of these factions would vigorously protest such an arrangement. Another potentially disruptive factor in the Ayub/Opposition negotiations are the university students, particularly those in East Pakistan, who have refused to abide by any compromise reached between the politicians and Ayub in which they do not concur.

Other Developments. While the violence has subsided, protest demonstrations are continuing. Bhutto has announced his intention to begin a fast if the state of emergency is not repealed by Friday, February 14. Women in Dacca staged a demonstration on February 10, demanding the immediate release of all students. As of mid-morning February 11 a complete hartal (general strike) was reported in progress in Chittagong, East Pakistan, and a nation-wide general strike has been called by DAC for February 14.

Ayub's own party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), which is still in session in Dacca, has dutifully reelected him to another two year term as party president. In an attempt to get at least a foot on the bandwagon, the PML passed a resolution calling for the release of all students arrested during the riots, and a group of thirty-seven East Pakistani PML National Assemblymen have called for the removal of Ayub's staunch supporter, East Pakistan Governor Abdul Monem Khan.

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